

Communicating With Farmers Under Stress

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Introductions



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Objectives



- Build awareness around potentially stressful conditions affecting some farmers.
- Learn stress triggers, identify signs of stress and review helpful techniques for responding.
- Learn techniques for identifying, approaching and working with farmers who may not cope with stress effectively.
- Learn where to go for additional help.

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Informal Survey

Who among you

- Are life-long, multi-generational farmers?
- Are in this business because you love it?
- Know of a least one farmer who is currently under great stress because of the economic uncertainties of this business or because of a medical-related matter?
- Believe that this farmer has adequate support from the existing social and economic safety nets?
- Are prepared to identify and deal with a stress-related emergency affecting another farmer?

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Farm Stress – What We Know

Farming is a stressful, high-risk profession.

- In 2016, 417 farmers and farm workers died from a work-related injury (fatality rate: 21.4 deaths per 100,000 workers) (CDC, 2018a)
- Opioids are an issue in rural areas: 3 of 4 farmers say it would be easy to access opioids (Morning Consult, 2017)
- Inadequate medical presence in most rural communities



Farm Stress – What We Know

Agrarian Imperative: “...impels farmers to hang onto their land at all costs. The agrarian imperative instills farmers to work incredibly hard, to endure unusual pain and hardship, and to take uncommon risks”
(Rosmann, 2010, p. 72).

*“The land means everything to farmers. . . .
Losing the family farm is the ultimate loss. . . .”*
(Rosmann, 2008, p. 39).

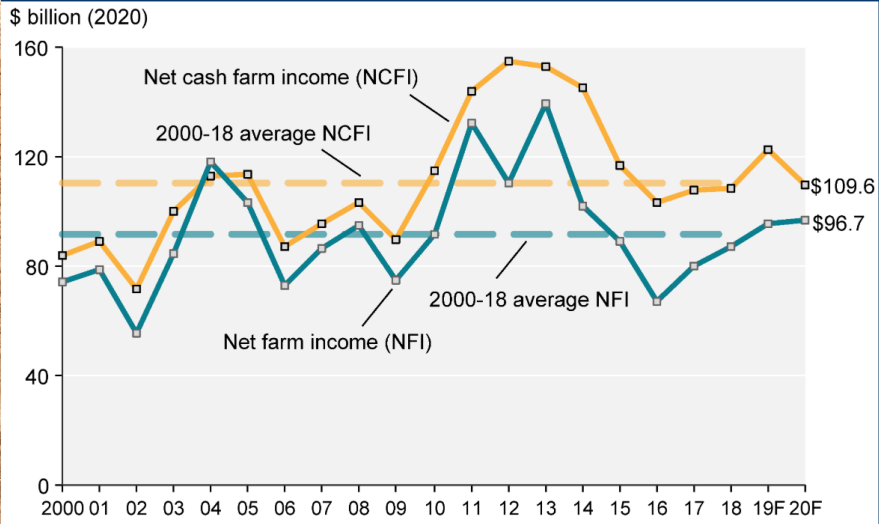


Net Farm Income and Net Cash Farm Income 2001–2019

Legend:

- Boom years 2011-2013
- 2.7% uptick in 2017
- Entering projected plateau period
- Dairy hit hard

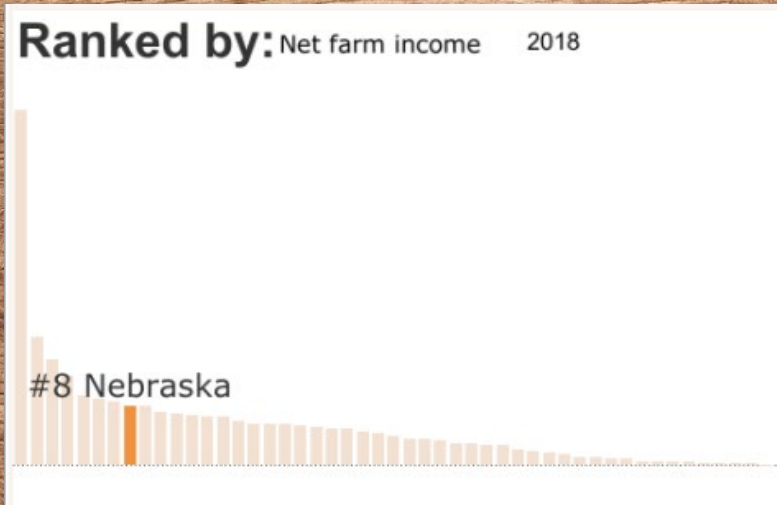
Net farm income and net cash farm income, 2000–20F



Note: F = forecast. Values are adjusted for inflation using the chain-type GDP deflator, 2020=100.
 Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, Farm Income and Wealth Statistics.
 Data as of February 5, 2020.



States Ranked by Net Farm Income, 2018



Nebraska Net Farm Income 2008–2018

Net farm income

2008-2018 (current-year dollars)



26% decline in net farm income since 2008

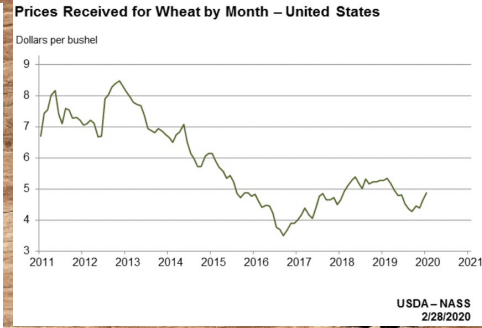
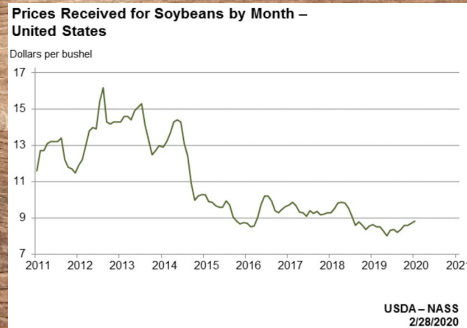
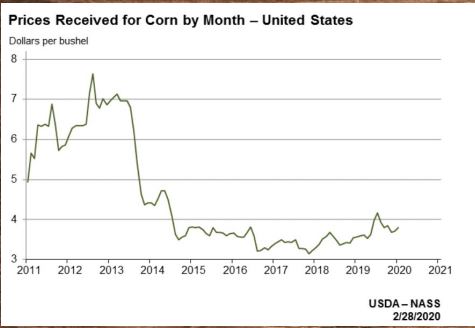


Cash Grain

CORN

SOYBEANS

WHEAT



Weather-Related Losses

FLOODING



DROUGHT



FIRE



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Summary

Price volatility will continue to exist and many agriculture markets are bearish for the near future. Many farms are struggling to cover cash flow.

Year over year, earned net worth is negative for many in multiple sectors of the agriculture industry.

Many farms are in financial distress, putting farm families under prolonged stress and causing mental and physical health issues.



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Identifying and Managing Stress In Ourselves, and Helping Others

STRESS IN YOURSELF

- The stress response
- Readily identifiable signs of stress
- Techniques for managing it
- Getting help

STRESS IN SOMEONE ELSE

- Signs of stress to look for in someone else
- Approaching farmers
- Active listening
- Develop a game plan
- Getting more help



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What Is Stress?

A need or demand people confront, that is perceived as burdensome or threatening, and can lead to physical or mental health problems (Pearlin 1989, Thoits 2010, Dimsdale 2008, Chen & Miller 2007, Keller et al., 2012).

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Weather



Large debt loads



Government regulations



Machinery breakdown



High interest rates



Crop yield



Livestock illness



Commodity prices



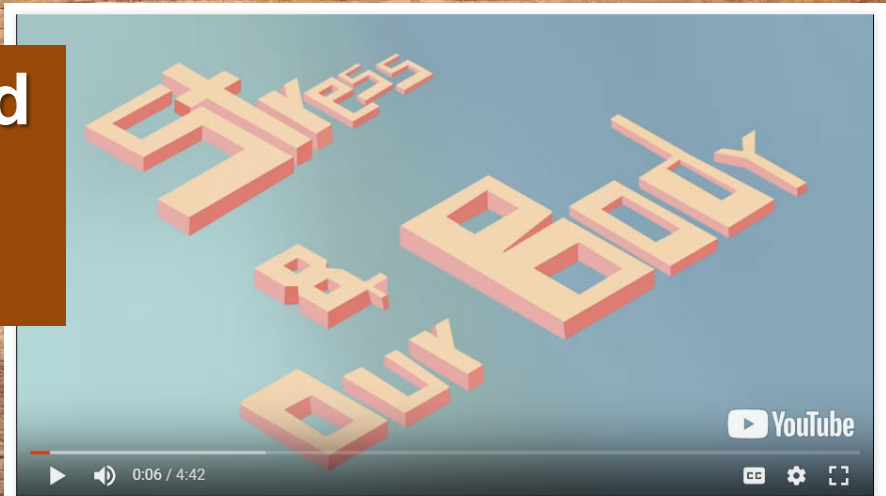
Disagreements with family members



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Stress and Our Bodies



<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-stress-affects-your-body-sharon-horesh-bergquist> (Bergquist, n.d.)



Explaining Cortisol



What does stress look like?



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Signs and Symptoms of Stress

Physical	Emotional	Behavioral	Cognitive	Self-worth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headaches • Ulcers • Backaches • Eating problems • Sleeping problems • Frequent sickness • Exhaustion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sadness • Depression • Bitterness • Anger • Anxiety • Loss of spirit • Loss of sense of humor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability • Backbiting • Acting out • Passive-aggressive behavior • Anger • Increased drinking • Taking drugs • Isolation • Violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory loss • Lack of concentration • Difficulty with simple decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel like a failure • Can't do anything right • Not being able to fix things



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Signs and Symptoms of Chronic, Prolonged Stress

- **Change in routine**
- **Care of livestock declines**
- **Increase in illness**
- **Increase in farm accidents**
- **Appearance of farmstead declines**
- **Children show signs of stress**

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How to Handle Stress

- Deep breathing
- Self-talk
- Meditating
- Exercise, Foods, Sleep
- Connect with people in your social network
- Speaking with a mental health professional



Identifying Your Social Support System

In a sample of 190 farmers and ranchers, lower levels of social support resulted in higher depression scores.

Providing social support:

- Promote effective communication with others.
- Organize and promote social support opportunities (for example, social events, coffee talks).
- Break down the stigma related to mental health treatment.

Source: Bjornestad, A., Brown, L., & Weidauer, L. (in progress). *Rural mental health: The impact of social support on depression symptoms in farmers*. South Dakota State University.



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Working With Farmers Who May Be Struggling With a High Level of Stress



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Approaching a Person Who Is Under Chronic Stress

- Preparing for a discussion
- Active listening
- Dos and Don'ts
- Preparing an action plan



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Thinking and Planning Ahead

Ask yourself some questions:

- Why are you going?
- Who are you meeting?
- What might you encounter?
- What can you help them with?
- How much time is needed?
- How much time are you willing to commit?
- Do you have resources?
- What is their preferred method to receive information? (Book, short paper, phone, internet website)
- How can you be of value to them? (Short- and long-term goals)



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Proper Mind Set

- **Do you have empathy?**
 - They don't need sympathy.
- **Do you know all of the answers?**
 - What is the likely response if you do?
- **Can you help them think, discover and live with possible outcomes of decisions to be made?**
- **What decisions need to be made?**

[Video: Brene' Brown on Empathy](#)

Photo: Copyright iStock.com/ZoranZeremski



Goal: Open, Honest Dialogue

- 1. Preserve the relationship.**
- 2. Create safety – listening.**
- 3. Develop a shared purpose – resolving.**

Remember, these are skills that require practice!



Active Listening Continuum

Ask

Probe

Attend

Restate

Paraphrase

Summarize

Reframe



Phrases You Might Use In Active Listening

- I can see that the current situation is hard for you. What changes would you like to see?
- I am eager to help you; I know you are going through some tough challenges. Tell me what I can do to help.
- I hear you saying _____.
- It sounds like you are thinking that _____.



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Stressful Situations – What to do

- I know of several farms in similar situations.
- Every situation is a little different. **Help me** understand better.
- Have you thought about _____?
- I could maybe help with _____.
- I think that if **we** _____.
- This new idea might _____. What do you think?
- Let's **write down** some of the pros and cons.



Stressful Situations

- People under stress typically don't process things as well as expected. They are easily overloaded.
- Be sensitive to help people organize information in a way that will enable them to remember and process what was discussed, and the consensus that was reached.
- Timely follow-up with a written communication reviewing the discussion is critical.



More Dos

- Follow up if you said you would.
- Follow up even if you **did not** say you would.



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**What, In Your
Current Role,
Can You Do?**

**Don't promise
what you cannot
individually do.**



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Relationship Between Chronic Stress and Suicide



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Suicide Warning Signs:

- Talking or writing about suicide or death
- Feeling hopeless, trapped, or like a burden
- Giving away prized possessions
- Making a plan, acquiring means
- Saying goodbyes
- Isolation from others
- Loss of interest
- Mood change



Suicide Warning Signs: Examples of Statements

Clear to friend: “I’m going to kill myself.”

Coded to son: “Don’t be surprised if I die in a tractor rollover.”

Clear to banker: “If you foreclose, you’ll be seeing my obit next week.”

Coded to friend: “If I should pass away, I want you to have my old Winchester 12-gauge.”

Coded to financial advisor/loan officer: “What happens to my debt if I die?”

Compliments of the QPR Institute (Question, Persuade, Refer [QPR] for Farmers and Ranchers)



More Suicide Warning Signs: Examples of Statements

To doctor: “Is this enough medicine to kill someone?” (indirect/coded).

To dentist: “When I can’t sleep like this, I don’t give a _____ about life.”
(indirect/coded)

To adult son: “I’m going to be leaving you nothing I’m afraid, just my burdens.”
(indirect/coded)

To adult daughter: “You’ll need to look after your mother when I’m gone.”
(indirect/coded)

To a best friend and pastor: No warning signs sent

To his wife: “Why don’t I just shoot myself and let the bank have this place?”
(direct/uncoded)

Compliments of the QPR Institute (Question, Persuade, Refer [QPR] for Farmers and Ranchers)



How Do I Ask Someone about Suicide?

Ask directly:

- Are you having thoughts of suicide?

Asking directly does **not** increase risk of suicide and may provide the person with relief that someone sees their struggle.

What if someone says “yes”?

- Do not leave the person alone.
- Call for help and/or take them to a hospital or healthcare provider.



Suicide Prevention Resources

American Foundation for
Suicide Prevention website

<https://afsp.org>



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Important Resources

- Center for Rural Affairs: <http://www.cfra.org/news/180130/10-helpful-resources-farmers>
- Crisis Text Line: Text “CONNECT” to 741741: <https://www.crisistextline.org/textline/>
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Crisis Chat:
<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/talk-to-someone-now/>
- Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255, Press 1 (website also has a chat option)
<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>



Review

- Farmers can have stress due to experiencing extreme economic conditions, weather-related emergencies, and other reasons, and may not seek help, in part due to lack of medical resources.
- Chronic stress is a common response to the challenging economic conditions farmers face.
- Listening empathetically is the most helpful thing you can do for someone going through extreme stress.
- Positive self-talk, mindful breathing and acceptance are proven coping skills.
- Never leave a distressed person alone. Call a friend, family member or even 911.



Would you be able to deal with a friend, family member or participant under extreme stress?



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Evaluation

Please
complete our
evaluation and
leave it in the
room.



Don't forget to visit:

www.msue.msu.edu/managingfarmstress

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Recommended Resources

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